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BIRDS, COLOUR, AND FEET: A "NAÏF PORTRAIT" OF THE BRAZILIAN TANAGER IN PIERRE BELON'S *L'HISTOIRE DE LA NATURE DES OYSEAUX* (1555)

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This article examines the transformations that the Brazilian tanager, a South American songbird, underwent as it crossed the Atlantic Ocean and was represented by the traveller and naturalist Pierre Belon in his bird treatise L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux *(1555). I show that Belon carefully chose his vocabulary and modes of depiction in order to address the constraints of his project, especially in showing colour; and I trace how subsequent representations further modified the imagery of the bird. As this article argues, the case of the Brazilian tanager reveals how Belon's true-to-nature rhetoric of his vocabulary and modes of depiction were meant to offset difficulties of using flawed or incomplete information in the case of descriptions, drawings, and physical evidence when it comes to preserved birds. Furthermore, I show that the red colour of the bird's feathers worked as a symbol of access to "exotic" commodities. In comparing Belon's text and representation to the ones in Ulisse Aldrovandi's bird treatise* Ornithologiae *of 1600, I examine the mechanisms of early modern "collective empiricism" through various layers of knowledge transfer.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1555 one of the first ever illustrated natural history treatises on birds was published by the French traveller and naturalist Pierre Belon (b. 1517 Souletière near Le Mans – d. 1564 Paris, Fig. 1): *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux, avec leurs descriptions et naïfs portraicts retirez du naturel*. Having studied botany and medicine in Wittenberg, Padua, and Paris, he travelled to the Middle East

Voy ce portraict, & di qu'en le voyant
Tu vois encor de celluy la semblance
Qui seul fait voir ores en nostre France
Tout ce qu'en soy voit le ciel tournoyant.
PAR G. A.

ANNO ÆT. 36.

AV ROY.

SONNET DE G. AVBERT.

Belon passant, Sire, par le trauers
Des flots glacéz, & des mers alterées,
Pour embellir tes terres bienheurées,
Aporte icy par maints aſpres deſerts
Ores des rocs les arbres touiours verds,
Or' les poiſſons de leurs bleues marées,
Puis les oyſeaux des celeſtes contrées,
Ne laiſſant plus rien libre en l'vniuers.
De ſes trauaux il remenace encores
L'Inde emperlée, & les arenes Mores,
Mais il ne peut plus rien ſans ton ſecours.
Rechaſſe donc, Sire, celle ſouffrance:
Ainſi touiours la couronne de France
Viue immortelle en ſes rares diſcours.

Fig. 1. Anonymous
Printed page with portrait of Pierre Belon. 37,5 x 24,0 cm, Coloured Woodcut.
Pierre Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux avec leurs descriptions et naïfs portraicts retirez du naturel…* (Paris: G. Corrozet et G. Cavellat, 1555).
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Réserve des livres rares, RES-S-160
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between 1547 and 1549, visiting Constantinople and Sinai among other places. After these journeys, he codified his collected knowledge in several treatises and publications. The first traces of his ornithological interests can be found in his travel account *Les Observations de plusieurs singularitez et choses memorables, trouvees en Grece, Asie, Judee, Egypte, Arabie & autres pays estranges*, published in 1553, in which he describes the avian fauna. Part of his main work on birds was reused in 1557 in his *Portraits d'oyseaux, animaux, serpens, herbes, arbres, hommes et femmes d'Arabie et d'Égypte…*.[1]

His treatise on birds appeared in a period that has been described as the first "scientific revolution", when several scholars and naturalists such as Nicolaus Copernicus, Andreas Vesalius, and Leonhart Fuchs published groundbreaking books in astronomy, anatomy, and botany.[2] They compiled both old and new knowledge, using antique sources alongside their own first-hand observations. As Giuseppe Olmi notably put it, this was the age of "cataloguing nature".[3] Included in this ordering were birds. This revolutionary intellectual tendency marked a crucial moment when unknown species from the newly discovered parts of the world and an expanding awareness of varieties of birds intersected with questions of classification in accordance with ancient systems codified by Aristotle and others. Within these new practices Belon himself played a crucial role in gathering information and translating it into the medium of a printed book with woodcut images. His bird treatise is divided into seven books with a total of 159 woodcuts,[4] and was published in the same year as Conrad Gessner's *De avium natura*, while Ulisse Aldrovandi's three-volume publication on birds, entitled *Ornithologiae*, would follow in 1599, 1600, and 1603. The works by Belon and Gessner are the first printed publications with illustrations showing various bird species, where Belon attempts a broad summary of the human knowledge of birds, describing about 200 distinct species. Visual material in the context of early modern natural history treatises (and beyond) has been analysed with a particular focus on the use of language in regards to visual representations.[5] Scientific images, such as representations of

1 For general information about Belon's biography and his oeuvre see Oreste Trabucco, "Pierre Belon viaggiatore e naturalista: dalle observations des singularités alla histoire de la nature," *Schede umanistiche* 2 (2004), 53–87; Monica Barsi, *L'énigme de la cronique de Pierre Belon. Avec édition critique du manuscrit Arsenal 4651* (Milan: LED, 2001); Paul Delaunay, "L'aventureuse existence de Pierre Belon," *Revue du seizième siècle* IX.1922, 251–268; X.1923, 1–34, 125–47; XI.1924, 30–48, 222–32; XII.1925, 78–97, 259–68. See also the critical introduction by Philippe Glardon in the facsimile of Belon's book on birds (Geneva: Ph. Glardon, 1997).

2 Guy Freeland and Anthony Corones, eds, *1543 and All That. Image and Word, Change and Continuity in the Proto–Scientific–Revolution* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Acad. Publ., 2000).

3 Giuseppe Olmi, *L'inventario del mondo. Catalogazione della natura e luoghi del sapere nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

4 In the case of Belon's woodcuts we have little information about the artists involved in the production of drawings for woodcuts. Belon himself gives the name of one painter in his epistle to the reader, Pierre Goudet who is generally identified with Pierre Gourdelle.

plants and animals from the thirteenth century onwards are often accompanied by phrases such as the Latin *ad vivum*, the French *au vif*, the English *from life*, the Italian *(d)al vivo* etc.[6] Belon also engaged with aspects of reproduction and truthfulness in his treatises, offering insight into the early history of the problem,[7] perhaps most prominently in the use of the adjective "naïf" in the book's title to specify the kind of portrayal he wanted to reproduce. This leads at the same time to the problem of truthful representations in cases where the material, i.e. the bird in question, could not be examined "from life".

Visual information in its various forms was collected and disseminated amongst communities of natural historians in early modern Europe to shape a shared general picture, or as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison put it, a "collective empiricism".[8] This transregional and epoch-spanning community significantly exchanged and developed new knowledge. Specifically, knowledge about unknown bird species initially depended heavily on the description of their feather colour. Consequently, in such treatises of the sixteenth century, it is worthwhile to better understand the motives and the processes of colouring; this issue is particularly difficult to assess in Belon's case. The implications of how Belon's illustrations of birds were coloured, are important, because colour was one of the most distinctive features used to determine a bird species until the eighteenth century. Only later did morphological features become the principal criteria of identification.[9]

Focusing on a South American songbird, the Brazilian tanager, I will show how an exotic bird which was completely new to the Europeans at this moment in time was received and how the condition of the bird influenced the production of visual material in Belon's treatise. In fact, the Brazilian tanager arrived in Europe already dead, conditioning its way of depiction — its "naïf" portrait, as I claim in this essay. Beginning with its earliest appearance in Belon's treatise of birds I will trace how the bird's colouration, feet, and their representation in visual material reflect concerns with accurate description of birds, and

Moreover, in his bird book he cites a painter working for Daniele Barbaro from Venice, who could be identified with Plinio Scarpello. See Joseph Roman, *Le peintre Pierre Gourdelle, 1555–1588* (Paris: Typ. de E. Plon, Nourrit, 1888); Michel Hochmann, "Plinio Scarpelli, pittore di Daniele Barbaro e dei Grimani di Santa Maria Formosa," *Arte Veneta* 67 (2010), 43–53.

5 José Ramón Marcaida Lopez, "Rubens and the bird of paradise. Painting natural knowledge in the early seventeenth century," *Renaissance Studies* 28.1 (2013), 112–27; Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi, eds, *Historia. Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Sachiko Kusukawa, *Picturing the book of Nature. Image, Text and Argument in Sixteenth–Century Human Anatomy and Medical Botany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

6 Boudewijn Bakker, "Au vif – naar 't Leven – ad vivum: The Medieval Origin of a Humanist Concept", in *Aemulatio. Imitation, emulation and invention in Netherlandish art from 1500 to 1800. Essays in honor of Eric Jan Slujter*, ed. Anton W.A. Boschloo (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2011), 37–52; Dominic Olariu, "Miniaturinsekten und bunte Vögel. Naturbeobachtungen und Tierdarstellungen in Manuskripten des 13. Jahrhunderts," in *Similitudo.*

address the demands of a "good" scientific image in the eyes of the authors themselves. Moreover, this article will shed light on the particularity of the red-feathered songbird as a symbol of an attempt at the colonization of the Americas.

THE "NAÏF PORTRAIT"

At the beginning of his treatise, Belon talks about the importance of images as part of the understanding of biological species. At the same time, he warns the reader to not only look at the visual representations but to view them in relation to their corresponding textual descriptions. Otherwise, he states, the "chapter" would be incomplete or defective.[10] This gives quite a good idea of how important the author considers the intertwining of text and image for a successful reading of his book, which means that neither part can function without the other. The insertion of reproducible images into the text made possible by the new media of print and woodcut allowed a new approach to the study of such material.[11] Woodcuts of the specimens in question paired with descriptions allowed readers who did not have direct access to the object to better understand the material under examination. To underline the veracity of those images, a particular vocabulary was employed. Phrases such as *au vif*, *from life*, *ad vivum*, or *(d)al vivo* which accompany these images in the context of natural history treatises hint at their epistemic virtues — norms, pictorial or otherwise, which drive forward knowledge and truth and are shared by a scientific community in a certain period.[12] This does not mean, however, that the image was actually drawn from life as the vocabulary suggests.[13]

Thus, in Belon's case, the full title of the book *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux, avec leurs descriptions et naïfs portraicts retirez du naturel* (The Natural History of Birds, with their descriptions and natural portraits made from life) includes a kind of pleonasm or tautology — a natural portrait made naturally — a rhetorical figure that enhances the attempt to deliver new and important

Konzepte der Ähnlichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, ed. Martin Gaier, Jeanette Kohl, and Alberto Saviello (Paderborn: Fink, 2012), 59–76.

7 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), ch. 2.

8 Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 19–27.

9 David Freedberg, "The Failure of Colour," in *Sight and Insight: Essays on Art and Culture in Honour of E.H. Gombrich*, ed. John Onians (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 245–62; David Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx. Galileo, His Friends, and the Beginnings of Modern Natural History* (Chicago/ London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002).

10 Pierre Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux* (Paris: Cavellat, 1555), f. ã iiij r. (All translations of Belon and other contemporary sources by Christine Kleiter.)

11 Bruce T. Moran, "Preserving the Cutting Edge: Traveling Woodblocks, Material Networks and Visualizing Plants in Early Modern Europe," in *The Structures of Practical Knowledge*, ed. Matteo Valleriani (Cham: Springer, 2017), 393–419.

12 Lorraine Daston, "Bilder der Wahrheit, Bilder der Objektivität," in *Einbildungen*, ed. Jörg Huber (Wien: Springer, 2005), 117–153, 118; Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 39–42.

information about the subject in question. Belon thus engaged aspects of naturalistic and truthful representation, weighing the benefits of reproducing an actual vs. ideal specimen.[14] Most intriguing in this case is the heretofore relatively unexamined use of the adjective "naïf" in the book's title to specify the kind of portrayal he wanted to reproduce (Fig. 2). Early traces of the adjective's meaning can be found in a French–Latin dictionary by Robert Estienne, published in 1539. Here the word "nayf" is given as the equivalent for Latin *genuinus*, "natural/authentic".[15] The *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que moderne* (1606) gives again "nativus, genuinus, germanus" and follows therefore Estienne's model. *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* of 1694 gives the meaning "naturel, sans fard, sans artifice".[16] Consequently, the term in its sixteenth-century use of "natural/imitating nature" suggests the author's attempt to create lifelike representations of avian subject matter.[17] This use of the adjective can also be found in his descriptions of birds in the treatise such as in the case of the bee-eater, where "naïf" stands for natural because of the true-to-scale image.[18] "Naïf" has to be seen, therefore, as an important indication of the quality of an image specifying its epistemic virtue. We can find similar expressions as well in the titles of Belon's fish treatises, such as "avec la vraie peincture" (with the true painting/image) in 1551 or "avec leurs portraicts, representez au plus pres du naturel" (with their portraits represented in the most natural manner) in 1555. The latter title suggests that naturalistic representations were attempted but not always achieved, thus providing insight into the author's self-awareness and the continuing challenge of image-making. These phrases, seen as a semantic field, mirror Belon's attempt to underline the epistemic virtues which he claimed in his images and his first steps towards a scientific objectivity.[19]

THE PRESERVED BIRD

One of the earliest printed descriptions of the technology of preserving birds in order to "transport them from one land to the other" is found in Belon's

13 Claudia Swan, "Ad vivum, near het leven, from the life: defining a mode of representation," *Word&Image* 11.4 (1995), 353–373. On the same topic regarding Jacopo Ligozzi see Michael Thimann, "Image and Objectivity in Early Modern Ornithology", in *Images Take Flight: Feather Art in Mexico and Europe 1400–1700*, eds Alessandra Russo, Gerhard Wolf and Diane Fane (München: Hirmer, 2015), 241–249.

14 Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx*, ch. 10, esp. 284; Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 55–63.

15 Robert Estienne, *Dictionnaire francois latin contenant les motz et manières de parler francois, tournez en latin* (Paris: R. Estienne, 1539), 326.

16 All dictionaries can be found on http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17.

18 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 226.

19 Still in the seventeenth century, French natural history books use the term "naïf" to attest to the veracity of representation. An example can be found in Claude Perrault's *Histoire des animaux* published in 1671/1676 and composed at the court of Louis XIV, where the expression "peinture naïve" was used in the preface of the work, which mainly focuses on the dissection and description of

animals. See Anita Guerrini, "The 'Virtual Menagerie': The Histoire des Animaux Project," *Configurations* 141–2 (2006), 29–41; on scientific objectivity see Robert, Felfe, "'Naer het leven': between image-generating techniques and aesthetic mediation," in *Ad vivum? Visual materials and the vocabulary of life-likeness in Europe before 1800*, ed. Thomas Balfe, Joanna Woodall, and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 44–88; Robert Felfe, "Ad vivum – nach dem Leben," in *Naturform und bildnerische Prozesse. Elemente einer Wissensgeschichte in der Kunst des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 77–111; Michael Thimann, "'Idea' und 'Conterfei'. Künstlerisches und wissenschaftliches Zeichnen in der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Disegno. Der Zeichner im Bild der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Hein–Th. Schulze Altcappenberg and Michael Thimann (München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007), 15–30; Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 55–63; Peter Parshall, "Imago contrafacta: Images and facts in the Northern Renaissance," *Art History* 16.4 (1993), 554–79.

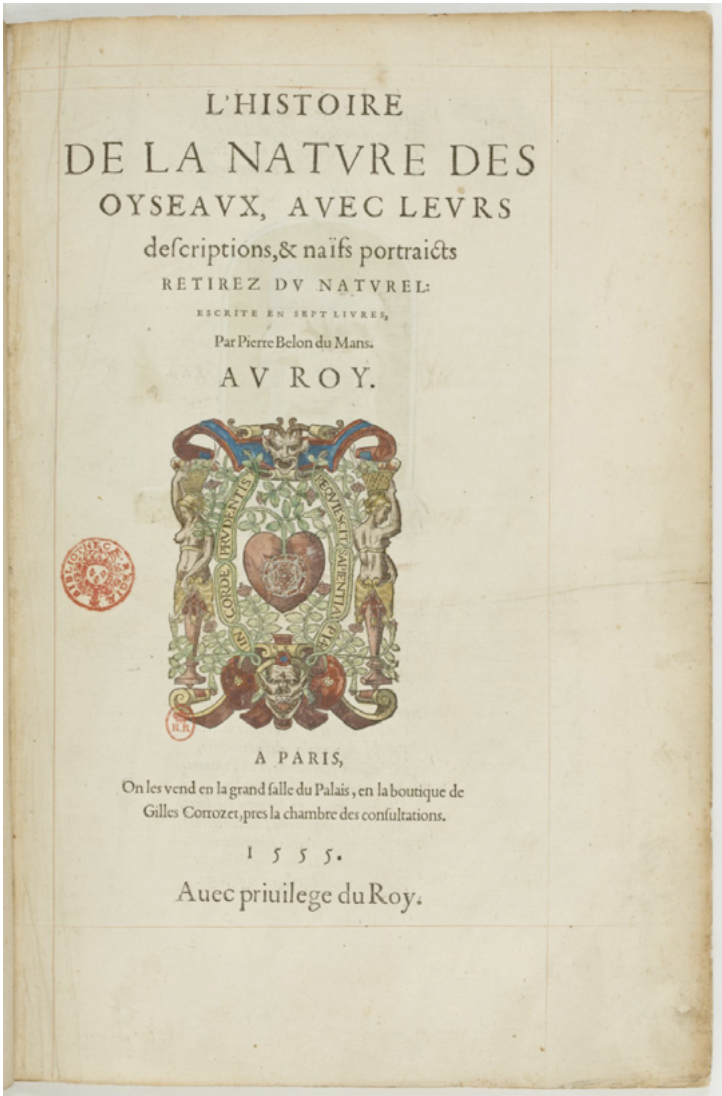
L'HISTOIRE
DE LA NATVRE DES
OYSEAVX, AVEC LEVRS
descriptions,& naïfs portraicts
RETIREZ DV NATVREL:
ESCRITE EN SEPT LIVRES,
Par Pierre Belon du Mans.
AV ROY.
A PARIS,
On les vend en la grand salle du Palais, en la boutique de
Gilles Corrozet, pres la chambre des consultations.
1555.
Auec priuilege du Roy.

Fig. 2. Frontispiece. 37,5 x 24,0 cm, Print with coloured woodcut Pierre Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux avec leurs descriptions et naïfs portraicts retirez du naturel…* (Paris: G. Corrozet et G. Cavellat, 1555). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Réserve des livres rares, RES-S-160 © Bibliothèque nationale de France

book, demonstrating his intertwined work of using text and image to display the actual study object "from life".[20] He describes a method of bird mummification in which the entrails are removed, the cavity of the belly and throat are rubbed with salt, and the body is then hung by the feet. In this way, the skin should arrive intact with its feathers.[21] Such a description shows an expertise in this early embalming technique and its practical motives. Belon also did dissections, and in his second book on fish he refers to a lecture on fish anatomy given before a group of doctors in Oxford in 1550.[22] Thus, his practical experiences directly influenced his written works. Images of bird skins or dead birds were consequently part of the common scientific imagery in the middle of the sixteenth century.[23] However, earlier literature often returned to the hypothesis that dead specimens from the Americas and Indies were the starting point for people in Europe to think about more elaborate preservation methods of bird skins; recent studies show that there was an ongoing tradition of perfecting the techniques for preserving bird bodies, mainly for hunting purposes with falcons such as for lures at least since medieval times.[24] This leads us to another role of preserved specimens in cabinets, collections, and other spaces as objects of aesthetic value or ornament and their use for study or hunting purposes.[25] The cabinets and *Wunderkammern* of the sixteenth century presented mounted birds or other animals in prominent positions in order to show them properly as objects of discussion and finally to attest the truth of their existence,[26] an idea Belon refers to in his text.[27] Belon's bird compendium, though, does not show any concrete images of preserving techniques or dissections, but the comparison of a human and an avian skeleton reflects Belon's deep analysis of the avian body and the underlying anatomical studies.[28] The inclusion of the description of the process of embalming and his clear use of anatomized specimens in his book were epistemic virtues that elevated his reliability and credibility.[29]

The case of the Brazilian tanager (Fig. 3, *Ramphocelus bresilius*, or according to Linnaeus' binomial nomenclature from 1766, *Tanagra bresilia*), a bird species

20 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 8.

21 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 8. For further readings on the methods used, see Paul Lawrence Farber, "The Development of Taxidermy and the History of Ornithology," *Isis* 68.4 (1977), 550–566; Harold J. Cook, "Time's Bodies: Crafting the Preparation and Preservation of Naturalia," in *Merchants & Marvels. Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 223–247; Karl Schulze–Hagen et al., "Avian taxidermy in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance," *Journal of Ornithology* 144 (2003), 459–478; Angelica Groom, "Collecting Zoological Rarities at the Medici Court: Real, Stuffed and Depicted Beasts as Cultural Signs," in *Collecting Nature*, ed. Andrea Gáldy and Sylvia Heudecker (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 19–35.

22 Belon*, La Nature et diversité des poissons* (Paris : C. Estienne, 1555), 287–288; Barsi, *L'énigme*, 20.

23 Katharina B. Springer and Ragnar K. Kinzelbach, *Das Vogelbuch von Conrad Gessner (1516–1565): Ein Archiv für avifaunistische Daten* (Berlin: Springer, 2009).

24 Schulze–Hagen et al., "Avian taxidermy."

Fig. 3. Brazilian Tanager (male) in the Tiergarten Schönbrunn (Austria).
© Photo: Norbert Potensky

from eastern Brazil, in Belon's bird compendium (Fig. 4) is revealing because in his description Belon hints at the bird skins of this exotic bird that arrived from the New World. An already dead and embalmed bird, most probably preserved as described above, was part of his examination: "Because likewise they [the merchants] cannot bring the birds alive on their vessels from these lands, they skin them to bring the dead bodies. […] One cannot bring these birds alive to our shores. There [on the shores] you can find many complete skins, which may be compared with the portraits that we provide [in this book], so perfect, that the bird is full of life".[30] Such bird skins resemble lying birds with their wings folded, a taxidermic practice still used today (Fig. 5).[31] Belon mentions in his description of the Brazilian tanager that many skins were sold directly by sailors in the harbour;[32] thus, we must consider that there was a large market for exotic animals — including their preserved remains such

25 Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Thimann, "Image and Objectivity,"; Paula Findlen, "Die Zeit vor dem Laboratorium: Die Museen und der Bereich der Wissenschaft 1550–1750," in *Macrocosmo in Microcosmo. Die Welt in der Stube. Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450–1800*, ed. Andreas Grote (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1994), 191–207.

26 Thimann "Image and Objectivity," 245; Daniela Bleichmar, "Seeing the World in a Room: Looking at Exotica in Early Modern Collections," in *Collecting Across Cultures. Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, ed. Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1–30; Dominik Collet, *Die Welt in der Stube. Begegnungen mit Außereuropa in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2007), 332; Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 147.

27 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 8. There he hints on the fact that in case of missing images or new species, the collectors could compare their own specimen with the text.

28 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 40–41.

29 Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 39–42; Sachiko Kusukawa, "'Ad vivum' images and knowledge of

DES OYSEAVX, PAR P. BELON. 319

son nid, comme aussi la contenance ainsi que le Merle, & la couleur du plumage telle qu'à dit Aristote, auons facilement conclud, que c'est luy qu'Aristote à entendu pour la tierce espece de Merle. Soudain qu'on à laissé la montagne d'Ambrun, & qu'on est deualé en la plaine, lon n'en trouue plus: & toutesfois estants là hault il y en à si grande quantité, que les hostes festient les passans au lieu d'autre gibbier. On les trouue de mesme goust, qu'on fait noz Merles noirs, & viuent de telles viandes.

Du Merle de bresil.

CHAP. XXVII.

CEVX qui font le trafic de marchandises es terres neufues, ne perdent les occasions de recouurer les singularitez, qu'ils pretendent vendre par deça: Car mesmemẽt ne pouuants apporter les oyseaux de ce païs là en vie dedens leurs vaisseaux, les eschorchent pour en auoir les peaux: & principalement ceux qui sont de plus belles couleurs, desquels est celuy que descriuons maintenant, & duquel les mariniers font leur profit, luy ayants donné le nom de Merle de bresil. Il n'est du tout si gros qu'vn Merle, ayant les plumes de tout le corps, excepté la queuë, & les ælles (qui sont de fin noir) plus rouges, que n'est toute autre couleur rouge. Il est impossible que l'artifice humain puisse faire vne couleur rouge, qui n'en soit effacee, la mettant en comparaison de ses plumes. Sa queuë est longue: ses pieds, & iambes sont noirs. Son bec est court de la façon de celuy d'vn Moyneau: ses plumes rouges sont noires à la racine. Il en ont peu aporter en vie iusques en noz riuages. Lon en trouue plusieurs peaux toutes entieres, lesquelles lon pourroit conferer auec le portrait qu'en donnons, aussi parfait, que si l'oyseau estoit plain de vie.

Merle de bresil.

Merle du bresil.

Description du Merle de bresil.

E iiii

Fig. 4. "Du Merle de Bresil". Printed page with coloured woodcut 37,5 x 24,0 cm. Pierre Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux avec leurs descriptions et naïfs portraicts retirez du naturel…* (Paris: G. Corrozet et G. Cavellat, 1555): 319. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Réserve des livres rares, RES-S-160 © Bibliothèque nationale de France

nature in early modern Europe," in *Ad vivum? Visual materials and the vocabulary of life-likeness in Europe before 1800*, ed. Thomas Balfe, Joanna Woodall, and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 89–121.

30 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 319: "Car mesmement ne pouvants apporter les oyseaux de ce pais là en vie dedens leur vaisseaux, les eschorchent pour en avoir les peaux […] Il en ont peu aporter en vie iusques en noz rivages. Lon en trouve plusieurs peaux toutes entieres, lesquelles lon pourroit conferer avec le portrait qu'en donnons, aussi parfait, que si l'oyseau estoit plain de vie".

31 For techniques of preservation see Farber, "The Development of Taxidermy"; Schulze–Hagen et al., "Avian taxidermy."

32 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 319.

Fig.5. Photograph of a study skin of a Fulvous Shrike-Tanager Leiden, Naturalis Biodiversity Center. © CC0 1.0 Universal

as skins, wings, single feathers, beaks, bones, etc. Traces of this commerce, especially with bird skins, can be found in another contemporary author, the French Franciscan friar and explorer André Thevet, who brought embalmed birds from the *France Antarctique* as gifts to the French king. He makes reference to this in his travel account, published for the first time in 1557 after his short trip to the New World in 1555/56,[33] the same year in which Belon published his book on birds: "and for many others of them I brought the skins with feathers, yellow, red, green, purple, blue, and many other colours, which were given as gift to the King, as singular things".[34] Later, in his book *La cosmographie universelle* (1575) he talks again about skins:

> another bird, which the Natives call Suuiath, as big as a blackbird and of which we know two species, one is completely black and the other is red as scarlet, and in my cabinet I have various such skins that these people flayed.[35]

33 *Les singularitez de la France antarctique, autrement nommée Amérique, et de plusieurs terres et isles découvertes de nostre temps* (Paris: Maurice de la Porte, 1557).

34 Thevet, *Les singularitez de la France antarctique*, 92r. : "don't j'ay apporté quelques corps garniz de plumes, les unes iaunes, rouges, vertes, pourprées, azurées, y des plusieurs autres couleurs: qui ont esté presentez au Roy, comme choses singulieres".

35 Thevet, *La cosmographie universelle* (Paris: Guillaume Chaudiere, 1575), 938v.: "vn autre oyseau, que les Sauuages apellent Suuiath, lequel est de la grandeur

The description by Thevet very likely refers to the Brazilian tanager and makes it evident that colour was an important means of description to differ unknown species; furthermore, it states that these skins (at least as reported by Thevet) were already prepared by the indigenous people who sold/gifted them to the Europeans, along with other products such as feather hats, capes, etc. The Europeans, as quoted above by Belon*, in primis* the merchants and sailors, could then sell the products directly at the harbours, or as in the case of Thevet, provide them directly to the collectors or as gifts to the king.

Regardless of the bird's attested status as an embalmed bird, in Belon's treatise it is depicted as most other birds in his book: in profile, sitting on a branch imitating a "natural" and rather lively pose. The red bird is placed before a grassy mound suggesting a certain habitat. Belon calls the Brazilian songbird "Merle du bresil", translated literally "blackbird from Brazil". The bird is discussed in the sixth book, dedicated to the group of birds that finds food everywhere such as the crow, the parrot and the "European" blackbird. Belon's statement that the accompanying image would show the bird "plain de vie" (full of life) could consequently refer to the skills of the taxidermist whose product of a mounted bird he probably studied in a cabinet, or to the imagination of the artist using the bird skin as model for his depiction. These are possible scenarios when we look at the 'wrong' form of the pointed, falcon-like beak or, in general, the body shape of the depicted bird. Even though the first examples of embalmed specimens could not be preserved for long periods — insects could quickly destroy them or the colours of the feathers could fade when exposed to too much UV light — they could at least offer sixteenth-century Europeans a first glance at rare species, fulfilling the owner's desire for marvels and exotic specimens. The picture serves, therefore, as a substitute for a type of object that deteriorated very easily. Such images functioned beyond the context of printed books. They were collected in cabinets or paper museums and used for study purposes by other naturalists.[36]

d'vn Merle, duquel s'en voyent deux especes, l'vn tout noir, & l'autre aussi finement rouge que Escarlatte, tel que encor i'en ay dans mon Cabinet diuerses peaux que ce peuple escorche". For references regarding Belon's *merle du bresil*, see also Dante Martins Teixeira and Nelson Papavero, "Os Animais do Brasil nas Obras de Pierre Belon (1517–1564)," *Arquivos de Zoologia* 45.3 (2014), 45–94.

36 The two most famous collections in this context are those by Ulisse Aldrovandi and by Cassiano dal Pozzo. See Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx*, esp. on Aldrovandi 369–340. On "paper museums" see Peter Burke, "Images as Evidence in Seventeenth–Century Europe," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003), 273–96; Andrea Carlino, *Paper Bodies: A Catalogue of Anatomical Fugitive Sheets, 1538–1687* (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1999).

RED: IDENTITY IN COLOUR

Belon praised the red-feathered "Blackbird from Brazil" as a "singularity",[37] a wonder ready to be inserted into a *Wunderkammer* context,[38] brought back from the transatlantic endeavours in the *France Antarctique* — today's Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro. The *France Antarctique* was an attempt of the French crown to colonize a part of what is today Brazil but comprised only a very small area under French control. Despite the short and unsuccessful period (1555–1567) of this endeavour, it nevertheless resulted in several travel accounts such as those by André Thevet and the French author and traveller Jean de Léry,[39] which testify to the French crown's interest in specific American goods: *exotica* and brazilwood (*Paubrasilia echinate*), a source for red dye.[40] Consequently, when talking about a bird named "Merle du bresil" and Brazil it should be noted that in its sixteenth-century use, the word *bresil* referred firstly to the name of a red dye. *Bresil* comes from Medieval Latin *brasillum* to originally denote the red woods used for dying clothes.[41] It is a kind of red that had been produced for centuries and was known and imported from the East. Indications of its use can be found, for instance, in London at the beginning of the thirteenth century.[42] When Pedro Álvares Cabral arrived in 1500 near Bahia, the area previously known as *Terra de Santa Cruz* was already known for carrying the brazilwood and named therefore *terra do brasil*, land of the brazilwood.[43] After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 the supply of redwood was interrupted until the discovery of its substitution species from the Americas.[44] Jean de Léry also noted that the red dye was used in Brazil by the Tupinambá to colour white chicken feathers for colourful feather ornaments on their bodies.[45] This relates to the need for red-coloured feathers for various purposes such as the featherworks mentioned by Thevet,[46] as well as the extended uses of brazilwood itself, which became part of the production of colouring red feathers, helping to create artificial substitutes for a commodity of high demand.[47] "Bresil" does triple duty as a signifier of an export good, the extracted colour, and finally the place.

37 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 319.

38 See Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 148–149.

39 *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil, autrement dite Amerique* (La Rochelle: Antoine Chuppin, 1578).

40 John Hemming, *Storia della conquista del Brasile*, trans. Paola Montager (Milan: Rizzoli, 1982), 27–9; and for a more detailed account of the French colonisation of the Guanabara Bay, 149–69. See also Michael Wintroub, "Taking Stock At the End of the World: Rites of Distinction and Practices of Collecting in Early Modern Europe," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 30.3 (1990), 395–424; see also Cameron J.G. Dodge, "A Forgotten Century of Brazilwood: The Brazilwood Trade from the Mid–Sixteenth to Mid–Seventeenth Century," *e–JPH* 16.1 (2018), 1–27.

41 Helmut Genaust, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der botanischen Pflanzennamen* (Basel: Springer, 1996), 106.

42 Spike Bucklow, *Red. The Art and Science of a Colour* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 43. For the reference, see E.M. Carus–Wilson, "The English Cloth Industry in the Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth –Century," *The Economic History Review* 14.1 (1944), 32–50.

When we look closely at Belon's text about this bird from Brazil, it is very clear that the description focuses on the bird's predominantly red plumage, in which the quality of the shade of red is admired most because — according to the author — this kind of red could not be created by human hands.[48] The inability to reproduce the tanager's red conflicts with Belon's insistence on the necessity of accurate colouring in representing birds. According to Belon, multiple species of small birds could be represented by the same woodcut, since colour was the only distinctive element. Belon writes:

> Consequently, if there are such strong similarities between the beings, how should the Reader then make distinctions between one and the other only with a picture but without colour? He who makes a portrait of a little bird, can easily use it for 30 others, if he uses the right colours: because, almost all have the same legs, claws, eyes, beaks, and feathers, which don't differ if not for the colour. This thought brought us to the decision to colour the portraits.[49]

The issue of colouring woodcuts is indeed particularly important in the case of natural history illustration in the early modern period, where colour was often a factor in the failure of images, as David Freedberg has argued for the Italian context.[50] Belon's wish to represent the tanager's colour failed because of the small number of actual coloured books, the irreproducibility of this particular shade of red, and the unreliability to the hand-coloured woodcut. Only with a real specimen or other "living" material such as preserved specimens in cabinets was it possible to give a rather "complete picture".

Indeed, in various coloured copies of Belon's bird treatise the red of the Brazilian tanager is one of the most intense and brilliantly coloured.[51] Upholding Belon's point in his epistle to the reader, the colourist of the copy at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris seems to take the accentuation of the red too

43 Genaust, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der botanischen Pflanzennamen*, 106; Brazilwood was not only used as dye for cloth, but also as a lake pigment for colouring manuscripts and prints. In general, red pigments such as madder, red lead, carmine/cochineal and the expensive vermilion were more valued alternatives for brazilwood, since due to its lack of durability, it was not entirely adequate for use in making high quality artist's pigments, see Tatiano Vitorino et al., "New insights into brazilwood lake pigments manufacture through the use of historically accurate reconstructions," *Studies in Conservation* 61.5 (2016), 255–73; on the variety of red pigments in use for colouring prints see Thomas Primeau, "The Materials and Technology of Renaissance and Baroque Hand–Colored Prints," in *Painted Prints. The Relevation of Color in Northern Renaissance & Baroque Engravings, Etchings & Woodcuts*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Susan Dackerman (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2002), 49–78; Jo Kirby and Raymond White, "The Identification of Red Lake Pigment Dyestuffs and a Discussion of their Use," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 17 (1996), 56–80.

44 Judith H. Hofenk de Graaf, "Zur Geschichte der Textilfärberei," in *Documenta Textilia. Festschrift für Sigrid Müller–Christensen*, ed. Mechthild Flury–Lemberg and Karen Stolleis (München: Deutscher

Kunstverlag, 1981), 23–36; Kirby and White, "The Identification of Red Lake," 64. Brazilwood was also used in Meso-America to colour manuscripts. 'Brazilwood' in *Pigment Compendium. A Dictionary and Optical Microscopy of Historical Pigments*, ed. Nicholas Eastaugh et al. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), 66–7; for a broad discussion of the transatlantic use of colour and pigments, see Gerhard Wolf and Joseph Connors, eds, in collaboration with Louis A. Waldman, *Colors between two worlds. The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún* (Milan: Officina Libraria et al., 2011).

45 De Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage*, 128. See Mariana Françozo, "Beyond the Kunstkammer. Brazilian featherwork in early modern Europe," in *The Global Lives of Things. The material culture of connections in the early modern world*, ed. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016), 105–127.

46 Amy Buono has studied this aspect in depth, with respect to the cultural phenomenon of the artisanal feather alteration practices in Brazil by the Tupi people, see "'Their Treasures Are the Feathers of Birds': Tupinambá Featherwork and the Image of America," in *Images Take Flight: Feather Art in Mexico and Europe 1400–1700*, ed. Alessandra Russo, Gerhard Wolf, and Diane Fane (München: Hirmer, 2015), 179–188;

seriously, and also colours the legs in red, although the text explicitly says that they should be black, along with the wings and tail. This example further legitimizes Belon's statement on the problems of colouring.[52]

It is noteworthy that the representation of a mostly red-feathered bird in a natural history treatise on birds, which according to its author should bear coloured woodcuts, became a symbol for the conquest of a small French part of the Americas. "Bird of Brazil" was synonymous with "Bird of Red" and consequently evoked the usage of and access to brazilwood for dying purposes. A coloured version of Belon's woodcut of the red bird thus gained an even more special meaning, although it "failed" in the first place for the reasons mentioned above. The tiny red songbird became a convenient metonymy for Brazil, because it could represent a place of origin, its commodity, the resulting products, and their attendant wealth.

COLOUR AND (LACK OF) FEET

The discussions regarding the extraordinary red colour of the Brazilian tanager and the bird in general did not finish with Belon's treatise. Such an exotic bird was the object of further admiration, trading, and collecting, and consequently also research and discussions among other scholars of the sixteenth century. Among these I want to highlight one case in particular: an uncoloured version of Belon's treatise with Aldrovandi's own comments. It is obvious that Aldrovandi studied Belon's writings in depth, given that he provided his own translation of Belon's bird compendium into Latin.[53] Furthermore, an intermediary coloured drawing (Fig. 6), after Belon's woodcut, is part of the *Tavole*, the collection of coloured drawings consisting mostly of animals, monsters, and plants, bound in several albums which served study purposes and eventually as model drawings for the woodcuts in Aldrovandi's publications. Lastly, Aldrovandi gives direct reference — as was good scientific practice — to Belon's "Merle du bresil" in his second volume of the *Ornithologiae*, published

Fig. 6. "Merula Bresiliana". Coloured Drawing
Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, Ms. 124, Tavole di Animali, vol. I, c. 60
© Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna

Amy Buono, "Crafts of Color: Tupi Tapirage in Early Colonial Brazil," in *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400–1800*, ed. Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate 2012), 235–246.

47 Françozo, "Beyond the Kunstkammer," 110.

48 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, 319.

49 Belon, *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseaux*, f. ã iiij r.: "Si donc il y'a si grande affinité entre les naturels, comment pourroit le Lecteur les discerner l'un de l'autre par le seul portrait, sans la peinture? Qui coucheroit le portrait d'un Oysillon, pourroit facilement le faire servir à trente autres, moyennant qu'on y adioustast les couleurs propres: car touts ont quasi les iambes, ongles, yeux, bec, & plumes de mesmes: & n'apparoissent differents à la veuë, qu'en la seule couleur. Ceste consideration nous à esmeu de faire que les couleurs seront mises sure les portraits".

50 Regarding ornithological treatises, see Freedberg, "The Failure of Colour," 252–3; Freedberg, "The Eye of the Lynx," 349–56.

51 So far, the present author has identified eleven coloured versions in various collections. The colouring is not always homogenous throughout, and the quality of it varies.

in 1600. Like Belon, Aldrovandi placed the Brazilian tanager among the blackbirds in his treatise (Fig. 7). He added a second woodcut of a red-feathered songbird with accompanying text on the following page of the double-opening (Fig. 8), affording this bird an entirely new chapter and nomenclature. The second image represents a presumably dead specimen of the Brazilian tanager, this time without feet. As can be deduced from the text, a drawing of the specimen was sent to Aldrovandi from the botanical garden in Pisa.[54] Two letters, written in the summer of 1599, provide relevant data about the bird and how it came to Pisa. The first delivers the information that Ferdinand I de' Medici, an avid collector of exotica from America such as featherworks and the initiator of a widespread network of trade in those commodities,[55] received two red-coloured birds. The two birds should be depicted by "messer Daniele", referring to Daniel Fröschl (b. Augsburg, 1573 – d. Prague, 1613), a German painter working at the Medici court between 1594 and 1603/04.[56] The second letter, written a few weeks later, confirms that the plan to depict the two birds by Fröschl had been executed and that the two little birds arrived from the Isle of Cape Verde — "regione indiana" (Indian region) — one dead, the other still alive. Furthermore, the letter contains the information that a coloured drawing (*pittura*) is attached to it: "the form of which I do not describe because the picture speaks for itself".[57] The living bird is identified as a red cardinal, whereas the information about the dead bird is more restricted: it arrived without feet, although in the letter it is stated that it should have had them. The bird's skin was stored in the garden's *studiolo* in a little box,[58] already one of the wonders of a collection of *naturalia*.

Since Aldrovandi was not quite sure if the bird described by Belon and the one without feet whose drawing (Fig. 9) and description he had been sent, were the same, he gave the bird a new name: *Merula apus indica* (Indian blackbird without feet). A bird without feet was not without precedent. In 1522 the first specimens of birds of paradise, also called *manucodiata,* "birds of God", arrived from the Moluccas in Europe. For conservation reasons, almost all of

52 Indeed, four of the examined versions follow Belon's description in the text and they even show the red stripe on the wing in the same manner as in Aldrovandi's coloured drawing.

53 Aldrovandi's personal copy of Belon's treatise is kept at the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, A.IV.H.I.57 (n. inv. A/5992) as is a Latin (manuscript) translation of Belon's bird treatise "Petrus Bellonius, de historia et natura avium" (ms. 55/III). The latter is mentioned in Laurent Pinon, "Entre compilation et observation: l'écriture de l'Ornithologie d'Ulisse Aldrovandi," *Genesis (Manuscrits–Recherche–Invention)* 20 (2003), 53–70.

54 The garden was founded as one of the earliest botanical gardens in 1544 by the Medici Family. See Anatole Tchikine, "Gardens of mistaken identity: The Giardino delle Stalle in Florence and the Giardino dell'Arsenale in Pisa," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 33.1 (2013), 39–50; and Irina Schmiedel, *Pompa e Intelletto. Formen der Ordnung und Inszenierung botanischen Wissens im späten Großherzogtum der Medici* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 59–63; Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi, "Arte e natura nel Giardino dei Semplici: Dalle origini alla fine dell'età medicea," in *Giardino dei Semplici. L'Orto botanico di Pisa dal XVI al XX secolo*, ed. Fabio Garbari, Tongiorni Tomasi, and Alessandro Tosi (Ospedaletto: Pacini, 1991), 115–212.

Fig. 7. "De Merula Bresilica". Printed page with colored woodcut
Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae tomus alter*, Bononiae 1600: 628.
Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, A.IV, H. III, 8/2
© Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna

55 Lia Markey, "Stradano's Allegorical Invention of the Americas in Late Sixteenth–Century Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65.2 (2012), 385–442; Lia Markey, "'Istoria della terra chiamata la nuova Spagna': The History of Sahagún's Codex at the Medici Court", in *Colors between two worlds*, ed. Wolf, Connors, and Waldmann, 199–218; it is likely that these red-feathered birds were also a source for featherworks.

56 BUB, ms. 136, XXVIII, cc. 124r. – 124v. Fröschl sees himself (just like Jacopo Ligozzi) as a "miniatore". Tongiorgi Tomasi, "Arte e natura nel Giardino dei Semplici," note 79; for more information about his career see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *L'École de Prague. La Peinture à la cour de Rodolphe II* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985), 218–220. Here we find also the birth year 1563; Helmut Trnek, "Jacopo Ligozzi," in *Prag um 1600, Kunst und Kultur am Hofe Rudolfs II*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Eliška Fučíková (Freren: Luca-Verlag, 1988), 138-40; Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi, "Daniel Froeschl before Prague: his artistic Activity in Tuscany at the Medici Court," in *Prag um 1600. Beiträge zur Kunst und Kultur am Hofe Rudolfs II*, ed. Eliška Fučíková (Freren: Luca Verlag, 1988), 289–98; Helmut Trnek, "'kaiserlicher miniatormahler und antiquaries'. Überlegungen zur geistigen Urheberschaft von Konzept und Gliederung des Inventars der Kunstkammer Kaiser Rudolfs II. von 1607–1611," *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wiens* 3

(2001), 221–230. Tongiorgi Tomasi in her article of 1988 speaks about two (!) cardinal-birds being native to Cape Verde. In her article from 1991 (note 83) she identifies the dead bird as a Scarlet tanager (*Piranga olivacea*). This is already criticized in Herbert Haupt and Manfred Staudinger, eds, *Le bestiaire de Rodolphe II. Cod. min. 129 et 130 de la Bibliothéque nationale d'Autriche* (Paris: Éditions Citadelles, 1990), although here the identification of the dead bird as *Piranga olivacea* has also been confirmed. See ibid., 376. I would suggest identifying it with the bird Belon describes as a Brazilian tanager. There are two more drawing collections of the sixteenth century where presumably the same bird is represented, one belonging to the sixteenth-century Lyonnaise doctor and botanist Jacques Daléchamps, and the other one to Marcus zum Lamm.
I assume that the first coloured drawing refers to Belon's woodcut and is a direct copy from the woodcut and the latter one was again made after the skin of a tanager. For an overview of the two albums today stored at the BnF in Paris, see Baudoin van den Abeele, "Les Albums ornithologiques de Jacques Daléchamps, médecin et naturaliste à Lyon (1513–1588)," *Archives internationals d'histoire des sciences* 52 (2002), 3–45 and Ragnar K. Kinzelbach and Jochen Hölzinger, *Die Vogelbücher aus dem Thesaurus Picturarum,* (Stuttgart: Ulmer, 2000), 304.

57 "la cui forma non descrivo per esser chiara in pittura".


Ornithologiæ. Lib. XVI. 629

DE MERVLA APODE INDICA.
Cap. XVII.

Fig. 8. "De Merula Apode Indica". Printed page with coloured woodcut
Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae tomus alter*, Bononiae 1600: 629.
Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, A.IV, H. III, 8/2
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them were without feet, sometimes even without wings, and mostly stored in wooden boxes,[59] a practice which continued into the seventeenth century. One of these skins in a storage box was depicted as part of the *Thesaurus Picturarum* made under the patronage of Marcus zum Lamm (1544–1606) in Heidelberg, a compendium containing many bird drawings made by several artists. This coloured drawing (Fig. 10) shows the skin of a bird of paradise that was gifted by Count Philipp von Hohenlohe to Friedrich I, Duke of Württemberg in a box richly ornamented with tendrils and the coat of arms of Württemberg,[60] testifying to the high value of this wondrous footless bird to collectors. Several accounts by travellers such as Antonio Pigafetta attested the absence of feet, leading to the idea of the bird as a natural wonder — a marvellous creature coming from terrestrial paradise which lives only in the heavens, and flies permanently subsisting entirely on air.[61]

The little red-feathered songbird without feet stored in a presumably tiny box in Pisa's botanical garden was no such bird. Yet Aldrovandi, though having doubts about this, described and denominated what he saw on the drawing and read in the description he received from Pisa, and eventually published the woodcut based on the drawing by Fröschl in his *Ornithologiae*. The bird in the woodcut is shown hovering over a rather barren mound; its open beak seems to angle for a light purple flower. This relatively free interpretation, with the artist adding a kind of habitat, shows on the one hand the impact or intervention that the artist could have on the final image, but also the artist's or Aldrovandi's possible desire to reanimate the dead bird. Several birds of paradise were represented in the same way in Aldrovandi's bird compendium.[62] As Dániel Margócsy has argued, the number of images one included per species in a treatise was a crucial testament to good scientific practice.[63] Aldrovandi individually numbered the images in his own copy of Belon's bird treatise in order to arrive at a total image count.[64] Indeed, Belon gives only one image per species or sometimes no image at all. Aldrovandi and other naturalists later tried to give multiple images in case there were doubts or there was

58 BUB, ms. 136, XXVIII, cc. 60v–61v.; both letters are reproduced in Alessandro Tosi, ed., *Ulisse Aldrovandi e la Toscana. Carteggio e testimonianze documentarie*, (Florence: Olschki, 1989), 428–30 and Garbari, Tongiorgi Tomasi, and Tosi, eds, *Giardino dei Semplici. L'Orto botanico di Pisa dal XVI al XX secolo*, 283–4.

59 Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing. Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006), 248–52.

60 *Bildwerke des Wissens. Ein Querschnitt durch 450 Jahre Universitäts– und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt*, exhibition catalogue, (Darmstadt: Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, 2017), 31; Kinzelbach and Hölzinger, eds, *Die Vogelbücher aus dem Thesaurus Picturarum*, 219–23.

61 On birds of paradise, see Claudia Swan, "Exotica on the move. Birds of Paradise in Early Modern Holland," *Art History* 38.4 (2015), 620–635; José Ramón Marcaida, *Arte e ciencia en el Barocco Espanol. Historia natural, coleccionismo y cultura visual* (Sevilla: Fundación Focus–Abengoa, 2014); Marcaida, "Rubens and the bird of paradise"; Erwin Stresemann, "Die Entdeckungsgeschichte der Paradiesvögel," *Journal of Ornithology* 95.3 (1954), 263–91.

62 Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae hoc est De auibus historiae libri 12.*

Fig.9. Daniel Fröschl
Coloured drawing of a red cardinal and a dead and feetless Brazilian Tanager
Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, Ms. 124, Tavole di Animali, vol. II, c. 155
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misleading information about the species in question. In the case of the bird of paradise he gave a total of five images.[65]

Finally, Aldrovandi's woodcut based on Fröschl's drawing raises the question of why Belon chose to represent his tanager with a more "conventional" bird sitting on a branch in profile. This image contradicts his statement in the text that the birds arrived as skins, which would imply that the bird´s depiction should be similar to that by Fröschl.[66] Was it to display a certain set of taxidermic skills that made the animal appear as if it was still alive? Was it to give reference to a certain mounted bird in a prominent collection he had access to? Or was it

... Cum indice septendecim linguarum copiosissimo (Bononiae: Franciscum de Franciscis, 1599), 806–16.

63 Dániel Margócsy, "The camel's head: Representing unseen animals in sixteenth-century Europe," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 61 (2011), 61–85.

64 Maria Cristina Bacchi, "Ulisse Aldrovandi e i suoi libri," *L'Archiginnasio. Bollettino della*

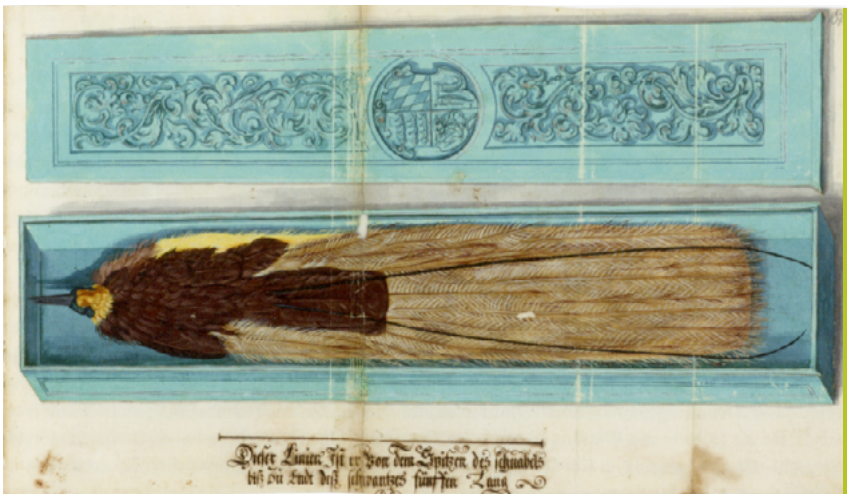

Fig. 10. Anonymous Artist
Coloured drawing of a wooden box with dead specimen of a bird of paradise. 17,1 x 30,0 cm
Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt, *Thesaurus Picturarum*, vol. 31, fol. 167. © Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt

to build up a homogeneous corpus of bird images in his treatise? Based on the scarcity of sources regarding the tanager, we cannot fully answer this question, but it shows the complexity of the problem of representing and describing an unknown exotic bird which arrived already in an altered condition. The choice by Aldrovandi to represent Belon's tanager and his footless bird side by side could also be an invitation to the reader to compare and discuss the two types of representations of apparently similar birds. Text, images, and finally the lay-out of the pages were not incidental, but rather served scientific purposes.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the representation and description of the Brazilian tanager in Belon's bird treatise we have seen the difficulties and various layers of depicting a "singularity", an exotic animal which already arrived in Europe dead and in an altered state. By examining the specific meaning of the adjective "naïf" and the broader semantic field around true-to-nature portraits in Belon's book, it can be demonstrated that the claim of "naïf portraits" depended greatly on the objects Belon was dealing with (bird skins or mounted

Biblioteca Comunale di Bologna 100 (2005), 255–366.

65 Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 806–16. It is significant that these five birds are shown as if in flight: in four cases there are clouds behind them and in the fifth the background is left blank.

66 On the complexity of traveling knowledge via woodcuts see Moran, "Preserving the Cutting Edge."

birds) or other factors such as accessibility to the materials. The method of preservation described in his treatise demonstrates, moreover, that he, much like other naturalists of this time, was an expert in this field. Such a method, already in use for centuries in a hunting context, was highly in demand in this specific moment when new, exotic birds such as the Brazilian tanager had to be transported back from overseas endeavours. Thus, a "naïf" portrait of an already dead and presumably mounted bird must be seen as an imaginary (re-)construction and as a product of the available methods.

Given the fact that colour in the case of the Brazilian tanager was more than a trivial matter, and that the colouring of the woodcuts was a concern of Belon, the question of colour resulted in a multi-layered metonymy where colour and bird bear witness to how sixteenth-century France was successful in gaining access to brazilwood and colourful feathers. Nevertheless, as Belon himself states, it was impossible to reproduce the colour of the Brazilian tanager´s red feathers in his treatise, given that no such pigment produced by a human hand could display the exact colour and the iridescence of the shimmering feathers. In this way, Belon's coloured versions of his treatise are also the perfect example of the failure of scientific images in this period where the expectations of a scientific image, its epistemic virtues, and the limitations of woodcut images and later hand-colouring conflict constantly.

In comparing Belon's description of the exotic bird with Aldrovandi's work, this article has sought to demonstrate that preserved specimens, descriptions, and drawings of the tanager circulated in ways that transformed the bird's meaning and its critical apparatus. Central to these exchanges and transformations of knowledge were its bright red colour and its missing feet, as has been shown in Aldrovandi's example and its analogies in footless birds of paradise. Both its colour and its feet were inconstant aspects in preserved specimens and their representation, leading to confusion when knowledge was transferred from one party to another. Belon's *merle du bresil* is thus a kind of marvellous

creature, a much desired *singularité*, testifying not only to the representation of power through colonial endeavours and their outcomes, but also the fascination with exceptional colour — with its multiple layers of meaning in the case of *bresil* — and finally unknown bird species. The bird, whether an embalmed and stuffed carcass or a two-dimensional image on paper, was — and still is — part of a vast visual archive of nature. Representations of birds in art and their at times seemingly ornamental use should therefore be analysed in relation to wider practices: the encyclopaedic display of birds and the pictorial "taxonomy" found in early modern treatises. Belon's treatise is one of the earliest examples of this phenomenon and the reception of Belon's work in its various manifestations is crucial, offering insights into the process of creating and gathering knowledge and its transfer.

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