

Natural History and the Arts from the Perspective of Religion and Politics (16th -17th centuries)

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Natural History changed in a fundamental way after 1550. Knowledge of the European flora and fauna grew exponentially. New research methods, models of description, and classification systems were developed to organize the increasing amount of information (e.g. in the works of Gesner, Clusius and Aldrovandi). The arrival of information about numerous new species discovered in Africa, Asia and the New World necessitated a comprehensive overhaul of the existing classifications. The increase of knowledge and information has often been regarded as the main cause of the friction between the so-called traditional, 'emblematic' worldview and a more 'scientific' one – although both concepts themselves are the subject of discussion. The micro-world of insects and other small creatures became a new focus of attention, moreover, partly on account of the invention of the microscope c. 1610 in Italy and the Netherlands.

The principal questions discussed in this *Arbeitsgespräch* are:

- How was living nature documented in early-modern science – *i.e.* collected, described and depicted? What is the intermedial interaction between these forms of scientific documentation, *i.e.* between collection, description and illustration?
- How was this scientific and intermedial documentation 'acculturated', *i.e.* transposed to the visual arts and literature? And how did this documentation change medium, for instance from collection (herbarium, collection of curiosities, botanical garden, menagerie) to scientific drawing or watercolour, printed scientific publication, painting or literature?

These two questions will be discussed in the combined perspective of the early modern religious worldviews and politics. What was, in the processes of the acculturation of Natural History, the role of religion and/or theology – of Reformation and Counter-Reformation – and its political implications?

By adopting this double perspective of religion and politics this *Arbeitsgespräch* seeks to formulate a new framework to two research projects: the NWO-project *Cultural Representations of Living Nature: Dynamics of Intermedial Recording in Text and Image* (ca. 1550-1670), recently started at Leiden University (see <http://www.wotro.nl/projecten.nsf/pages/2300158619>), and the recently published volume *Early Modern Zoology. The Construction of Animals in Science, Literature and the Visual Arts*. Eds. K.A.E. Enenkel & P.J. Smith, Leiden: Brill, 2007.

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